
Digital Humanities or humanities in digital?

André Pacheco*^{†1}

¹University of Coimbra – Portugal

Abstract

Over the past few decades we have been witnessing the availability of an array of novel digital tools and technologies for data creation, collection, analysis and dissemination that have permeated and transformed scholarly practices across all disciplines. Curiously, in the humanities, unlike in any other field of science, the use of these new tools has given birth to a new, still divisive movement called Digital Humanities. As a result, the boundaries between humanities and digital humanities has become a grey zone that requires debate which I believe that should focus not on what changed, but rather what remains at the core of scholarly practice. As such, this paper aims to provide a much necessary theoretical contribution to the discussion of the nature of this field.

This study uses a mixed methodology that combines qualitative methods of source selection and documentary research with quantitative methods of data analysis. The initial sample is comprised of articles indexed in the core collection of Web of Knowledge, under the topic "digital humanities", and the "Information Science, Library Science" category. Then, a quantitative analysis of the yearly publications, regions, publishing languages is undertaken in order to contextualize scholarly production in Digital Humanities, from this database's perspective. The discussion is initiated with notion of scholarly primitives (discovering, annotating, comparing, referring, sampling, illustrating, representing), as formulated initially by John Unsworth in 2000. These are compared to the suggestion of Palmer and colleagues, in 2009, of scholarly information practices, and to Project Bamboo's 2010 themes of scholarly practice. These primitives aim to be staples across era and media for scholar activities, and act as checklists for building new digital tools. Therefore, they are suitable as a starting point for the discussion of scholarly practices, specifically, the practices of digital humanities scholars, with the aim of contrasting them to oldschool practices of humanists. The discussion is then fueled by articles retrieved through the qualitative source selection. The evolution of the term 'Humanities Computing', as initially appeared in 2004 in Blackwell's *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, towards 'Digital Humanities' is analyzed in order to illustrate changes in scholar mentality, identity and culture.

As a conclusion, it is argued that the 'who', 'what' and 'why' of research in the humanities remains immutable, but the 'how' is transformed by digital tools. The practices of scholarly primitives might change, with the diluting of secular borders between sciences and the humanities, but the research principles do not. Also, it is noted that Digital Humanities, more than a well-defined field, should be understood as a community characterized by a culture of collaboration, networking and openness to novel research tools that allow for unprecedented methods for creating, processing and sharing research data.

*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: andrez.pacheco@gmail.com

Keywords: Digital humanities, Web of Science, Library and Information Science, scholarly primitives